10: d'Orleans--321 [3] T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 288, 531, 548

"The scarves which are celebrated in Indo-China, embroidered by hand with a great variety of design, and in very harmonious colours, denote great taste. After the saleswomen have folded their goods and packed them up to take away, some of them lag behind and tell us that they are themselves for sale at twenty-five or thirty rupees."

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Laotians AM8

837 suitable girl, and was back with one by six-thirty. At seven the
588 bonzès came and performed a marriage ceremony which took half an hour. At seven-thirty we opened a bottle of champagne and drank to the health of the bride and bridegroom, and by eight they were already in bed.'

● 548 The evening was rounded off by a routine visit to the local opium den, which, probably by design, was as decrepit and sinister as a waxworks exhibit. We stayed only a few minutes in this green-lit, melodramatic establishment, but it was clear that the unprofitable puff at the pipe was not to be avoided. One had to make some show of going to the devil.

000 I was lodged in the minor palace of the *Conseiller de la République*, the senior French official in Northern Laos, a Monsieur Leveau. The *Conseiller* was a man whose shyness and slight reserve of manner failed to mask a quite extraordinary hospitality. He never, for instance, issued a formal invitation to a meal, preferring with an air of casual assumption to say something like: 'Of course, you'll be dining at home tonight.' Monsieur Leveau was married to a Laotian wife, to whom I was not presented, and the huge official building always seemed strangely empty. We dined facing each other across a darkly gleaming wasteland of ambassadorial table. Sometimes a Laotian servant stole into the room carrying dishes; trailing behind him the distant sounds of a domestic interior. These were immediately sealed off by the closing of the door, leaving us to the vault-like silences of the huge room. As we sat there the light bulbs gave out in various parts of the room and were swiftly re-
365 placed. In Luang Prabang the electric current was switched on at the same time as the water was turned off — at seven-thirty. But the result was no more than a feeble striving of the filament, and the lamp in my bedroom produced a light considerably less than that of one candle. Monsieur Leveau partly got over this difficulty by enormously over-running lamps intended for a much lower voltage, but they did not last long.

[at Luang Prabang. 286
--Analyst]

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina

1[M. Leveau, senior French official in Laos.--Analyst] Laotians AM8 Kha AM7

INTO THE MEO COUNTRY

After dinner, when the Conseiller[1] relaxed for an hour, he could sometimes be persuaded to talk about some of his problems. These were the chronic worries of the Issarak[2] and the Viet-Minh. To the west of Luang Prabang the frontier with Burma started, and Burmese irregulars crossed it from time to time. Chinese opium smugglers conducted a regular trade with the Meos, and turned pirate when business was bad. But now that the communists had taken over in Yunnan there was some signs of this traffic slackening. And then the Meos themselves. They were passing like a blight through the mountains. Leveau's ambition was to change their agricultural habits. If they could be persuaded to come down to 1000 feet he could give them irrigated rice-fields to cultivate, and had offered to provide the buffaloes to do the work. L 669 579 548

I brought up the question of the Khas. The Khas are the aboriginals of Laos and are, in fact, Moï tribes under another name. Several hundred years ago they were conquered and enslaved by the Laotian nation, and now Khas were to be seen hanging about the market places of Laotian towns and villages, utterly broken and degenerate; as helpless as the pathetic remnants of once powerful Indian tribes in North America. I asked if it was true that Laotians still possessed Kha slaves. Leveau smiled in his tolerant and sceptical Laotian way and said that it all depended what you meant by slavery. The slavery of the old West Indian plantation kind was unknown in the Far East. For superstitious if for no other reasons, the peoples of Indo-China always trod very gently when it came to oppression of others. The spirits of their ancestors had to be reckoned with, and they themselves if pushed too far might be forced to revenge themselves by the efficient, occult methods strangers were always imagined to possess. He cited the well-known fact of a collective bad-conscience on the part of the Vietnamese, who conduct special sacrifices and offer symbolical rent to the spirits of the unknown aboriginal possessors of the land they now occupy. Leveau believed that slavery did occasionally exist, but that it took more the form of a racial aristocracy maintaining a subject people in a condition of K 566 769 566

2["free men" of Laos and Cambodia.--Analyst]

586 "If a husband remains absent for more than three years without sending news of his whereabouts, a divorce in the wife's favor is legally established. The same period of time and the same conditions are required to break an engagement which has been publicly announced by the parents.

"When a man and wife have had enough of living in common they take leave of one another by dividing their common acquisitions, except for the fact that each one takes back what he brought with him to the marriage. A woman who wants a divorce places a bouquet and two wax candles on the common bed.

"Usually a husband leaves his wife free to separate from him and has recourse to law only to obtain restitution of any part of the common property which his wife may have taken with her illegally.

"A wife who has committed adultery is at the discretion of her husband, who may demand that she be meted out the "Royal Penalty," that is to say either death or life imprisonment. He may also be content with a fine. We should hasten to say that the outraged husband always asks for the fine, which is inflicted on both guilty parties, the adulterous wife and her lover. The fine varies, depending on the region, from 170 to 800 francs.

"If a husband brings three complaints against his wife for adultery with three different persons, he is the one who is punished the third time, for he is considered to be a complaisant husband.

"Relations between unmarried persons are regarded as adulterous.

"A case is also considered adulterous, and punished in the same way, if any man and married woman are surprised alone in an isolated spot or are found talking together in the husband's house with no witnesses present.

"Adultery on the part of the husband is covered by the local law within the general formula which assimilates relations between two unmarried persons to adultery." (Le Laos français.) [Lieutenant-colonel Tournier (Superior Resident in Laos), "Notice sur le Laos français," Revue Indochinoise, Hanoi, 1900.]

548 Prostitution. The facilities provided by Laotian customs in the matter of marriage and divorce are such that prostitution does not, so to speak, exist. It is true that a few women are found in the large centers, especially since our settlement in Laos, who are prostitutes or are notoriously known to pursue clandestine prostitution, but this is an exception due solely to the presence of native troops and Oriental "boys" hired as servants [200] by Europeans. These women are,

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moreover, the object of the utmost scorn on the part of the whole population, and their houses are relegated to points outside the muong, that is to say outside the city.

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No such practice exists in rural areas, and if a few girls grant their lovers great intimacies it is in the hope--a hope which is almost always realized--that marriage will be the result.

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Death, burial, cremation. In principle, Laotians are supposed to cremate their dead. In this they are obedient to the ancient traditions which specified this ceremony, but since cremation is a costly practice poor people are simply buried.

In certain cases, as in deaths resulting from dysentery epidemics, from childbirth, from suicide, etc., the bodies are thrown into the river or its tributaries.

Laotians have no cemeteries enclosed by walls or barriers. A corner of the forest near the muong or village is reserved for this use and serves as a last resting place for those of the inhabitants who cannot be cremated or should not be thrown into the water. There, at the foot of the trees and in their shade, repose those adults and adolescents whose families did not even have means to buy the ritual cremation firewood, and also the children who never underwent the operation of "cutting the forelock" (1).

(1) This operation takes place at the age of thirteen and marks the transition from childhood to adolescence. It is the sign of nubility. [881]

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When it is to be buried, the body of the dead person is placed in a sort of coffin made of ax-hewn planks which are usually poorly joined and covered with colored paper burdened with ornamentation. Sometimes a mat is used, in simpler fashion, or else lattices made of split and crushed bamboo stalks like those which form the floors of houses. The whole is tied together with rattan or with bamboo bark.

This is the lot of destiny's outcasts. After a few family ceremonies and a feast given in the dead person's home [201]--the magnitude of which ceremonies and feast vary depending on the dead person's station in life and his family's resources--the bonzes, accompanied by a few pupils, come and recite the funeral orisons.

The bonzes are not supposed to look at the body during their prayers, and they hold up a screen called Talapat to hide their faces.